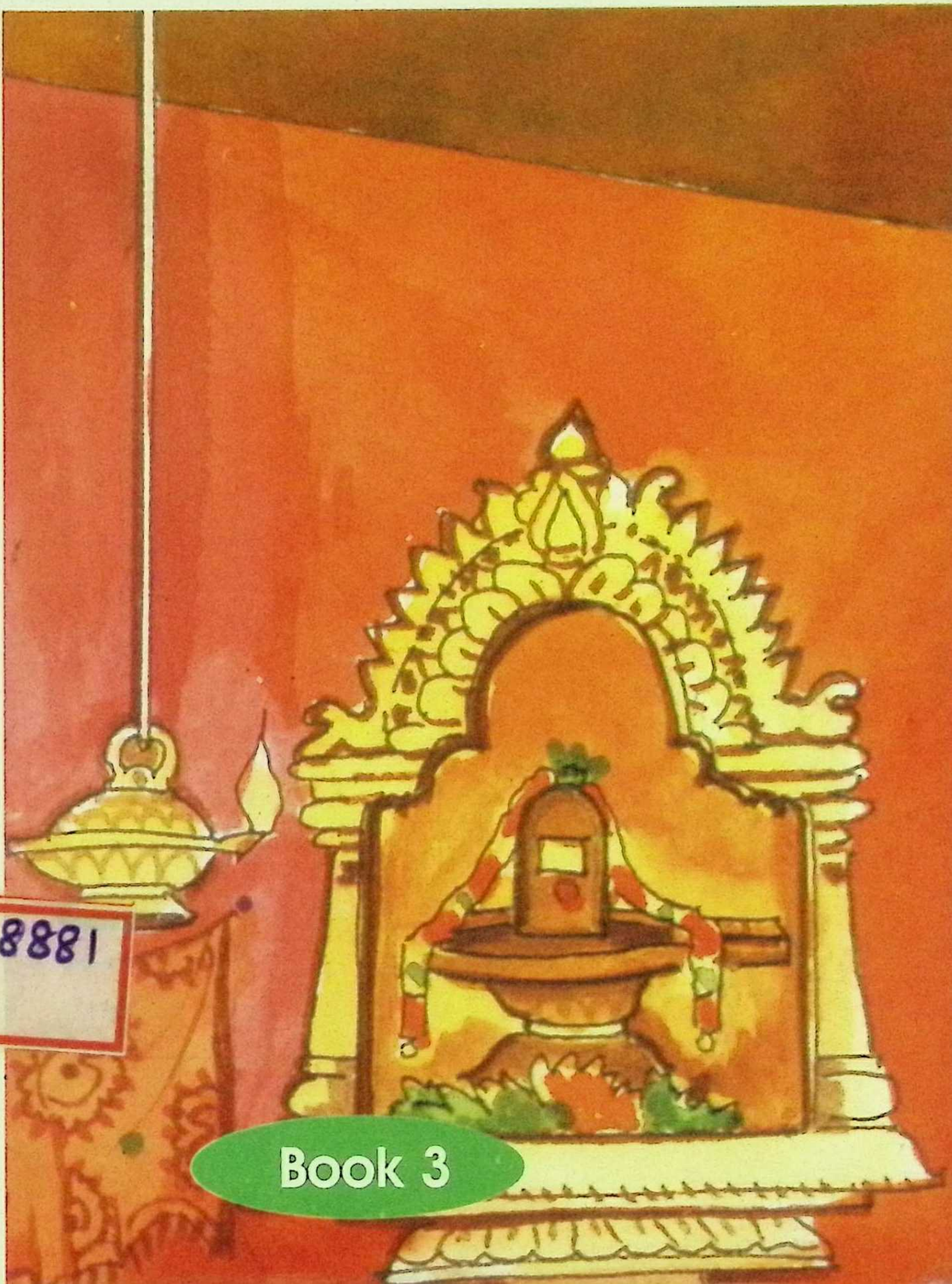
# STORIES OF 63 SAINTS OF SOUTH INDIA





Book 3

# STORIES OF 63 SAINTS OF SOUTH INDIA

## The Stories of this Book

NANDANAR

THIRUKURIPPU THONDAR

CHANDESA NAYANAR

APPAR THE DYNAMIC SAINT

KULACHIRAI NAYANAR



Book 3

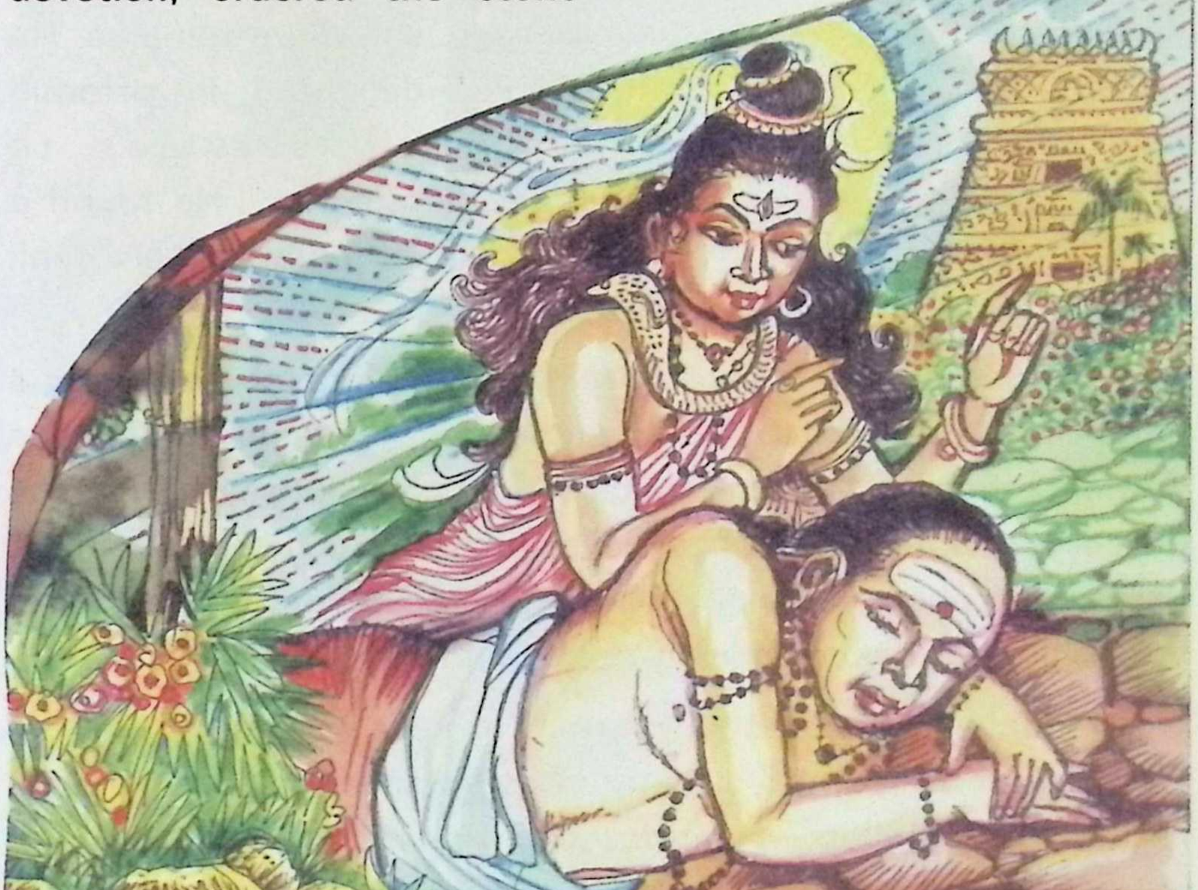
# NANDANAR

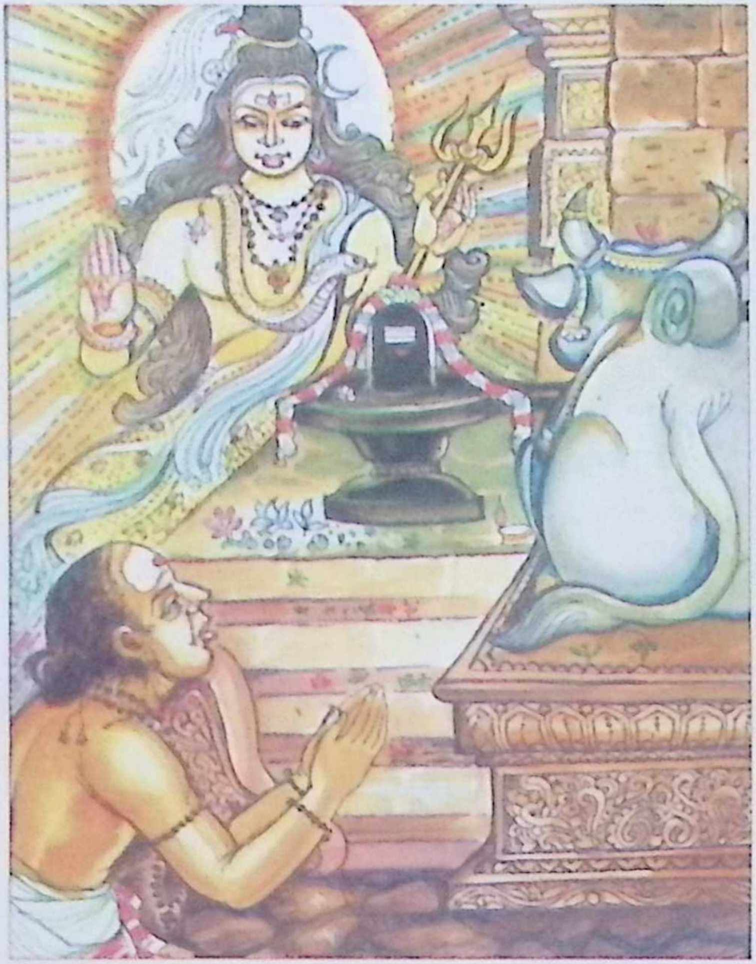


Adanur on the bank of river Kolladam was a luxuriant village with bountiful fields and fragrant groves. A slum (harijan quarters) stood amidst such splendour. The poor folk crushed and threshed grain. They worked hard all day and danced wildly at night. Their drum beats and lilting music rang in the air. Among these untouchables was born a luminous saint who set an inspiring example to the whole world. He was Nandanar otherwise called Tirunalaipovar. He was a remarkable child, who was engrossed in devotion to the Lord. He wistfully gazed at the temple tower and was fascinated by the mystery inside the sanctum of the shrine. Nanda and other devotees only glimpsed

the temple images from a distance when they were taken in a procession. As he grew, his devotion to the Lord increased. He lived a simple life of self-restraint and self-denial and gave to temples whatever he could save. He offered leather and straps for drums, strings for harps and fiddles. He yearned for a glimpse of the radiant sanctum of Sivalokanathar. But the stone-bull hid his view. The atmosphere of sacred solemnity, as rituals were conducted, awakened emotional communion in his heart. He visited the Sivalokanatha's temple and stood behind the flag-staff struggling to get a view of the Lingam in the sanctum.

The Lord, pleased with his ardent devotion, ordered the stone





bull to move aside and Nandan and his friends had a clear view of the sanctum where the Lingam was worshipped. He made his heart the sanctum of Siva and began worshipping him there. Nandanar visited all the temples near his village and cultivated pious enthusiasm to see more temples. He delighted in offering his services to temples. He found a spring and dug a tank near the temple at Tiruppungoor.

One day he heard about the glory of Chidambaram from a Pandit who was addressing an audience. Chidambaram means wisdom ether-the ethereal space of God-consciousness. It is the psychic ether in a Yogin's heart; Chidambaram is the ideal temple, the temple par excellence. Nataraja resplendent in the Hall of Wisdom is the most wonderful representation of the Divine.

Nandanar passionately yearned to see Nataraja inside the Chidambaram temple. Many days passed and his longing remained unfulfilled. He crossed the river, and faced trials to stand before the high-walled temple-gate of Chidambaram. He



wept in pious fervour and abandoned himself into the hands of the Divine grace and prayed for a chance to glimpse Nataraja.

The priests wondered at his devotion and fervently prayed that Nataraja should have mercy on him. Nataraja appeared in their dreams and commanded them to take the devotee into their fold after a bath in the purifying flames lit with Veda mantras and lead him to his presence. Nandanar also had a similar dream vision of Nataraja showering his blessings on him and ordering him to undertake the ordeal of a holy fire.

The resplendent dawn brought victory to the yearning soul. The fire was lit. Nandanar passed through the ordeal calmly and serenely as his destiny was in the hands of the Lord. The priests of the temple were dumbstruck when they saw the Harijan of yesterday transformed into a splendour of divinity. He was let into the temple. Nandan entered the sanctum and fulfilled his heart's desire. Saints showered flowers on him chanting the Vedas. Like a beautiful bride approaching her Lord for divine communion Nandanar moved towards Nataraja and disappeared.

Solemn silence descended on the audience, who stood dumb founded with wonder. Birth, caste and creed do not count before the sincere devotion of a servant of God.

The Lord rewards faith and fervour regardless of other differences.



# THIRUKURIPPU THONDAR

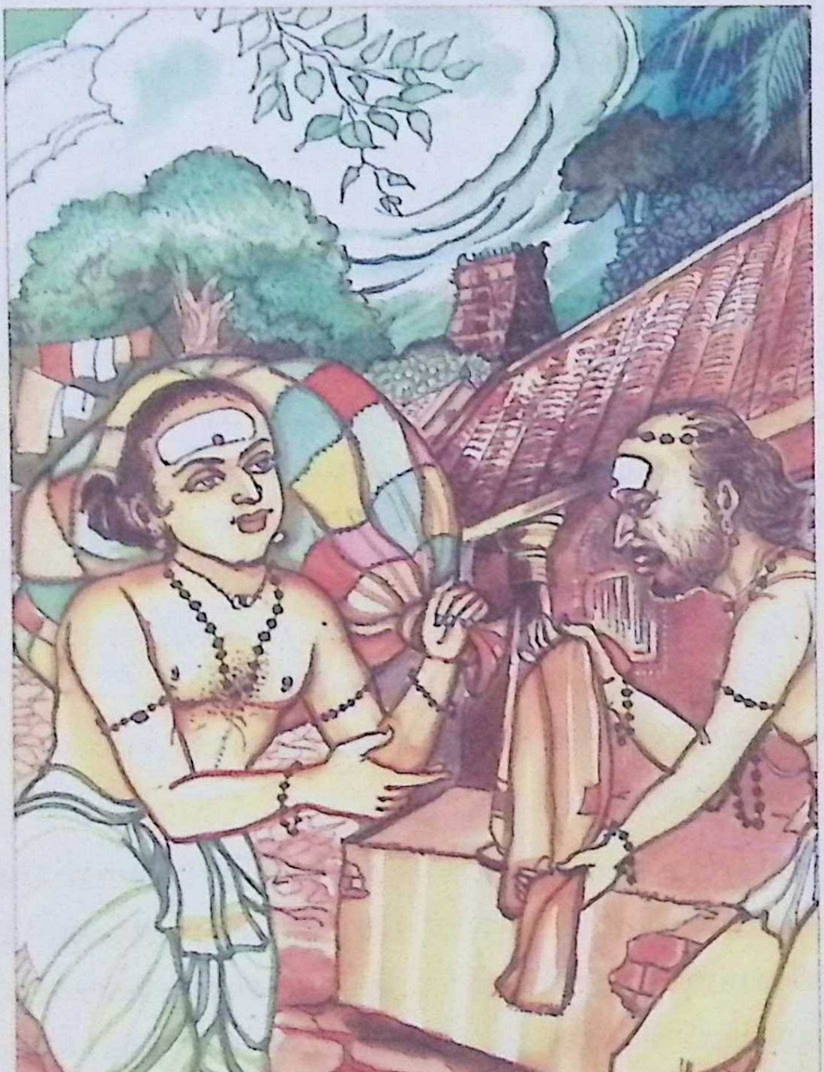
Thondaimandalam was a region rich in agricultural wealth, forests, sea coasts and vast plains. It was a home to many scholars, savants, mendicants, devotees and philanthropists and had many pilgrim centres. The people were kind and honest and led a peaceful life. The capital of Thondaimandalam was Kanchipuram, known for its temples and cultural heritage. This was the place where Lord Siva taught the Agamas to His consort Parvati. The city had a spiritual and mystic atmosphere, which drew Bhaktas from all over.

Here lived a washerman, who was a true devotee of Siva and readily attended to all His devotees. He would volunteer to wash their clothes, without even being asked. This understanding earned him the name Tiru Kurippu Thondar. He used to constantly utter the name of Lord Siva as he went about his washing and felt that his work washed his sins of his previous birth. God decided to reveal his devotion to the world one day. Lord Siva took the form of a poor old man, wearing worn out dirty clothes. On seeing him, the Nayanar welcomed him warmly and offered to wash his dress. The old man agreed but on one condition. He was using them to protect himself from cold and therefore they should be returned to him by evening.

The Nayanar agreed and went to the river to wash the clothes and managed to wash them well after several attempts; by that time it was evening and it began to rain. He was very upset, when the rain continued till the night; he had failed in his duty and the old man would be shivering in the cold. Feeling great remorse, he

came to the decision to punish himself. He decided to hit his head on the washing stone and die.

As he did so, the stone turned soft and the Divine hand held his head. The Lord then declared that the sincere devotee had stood the test successfully and revealed His heavenly vision to the Nayanar along with His consort Parvati. The oracle also declared that the devotee's piety and sincerity have been revealed to the world and that he deserved to reach the Lord's abode for enjoying eternal bliss.



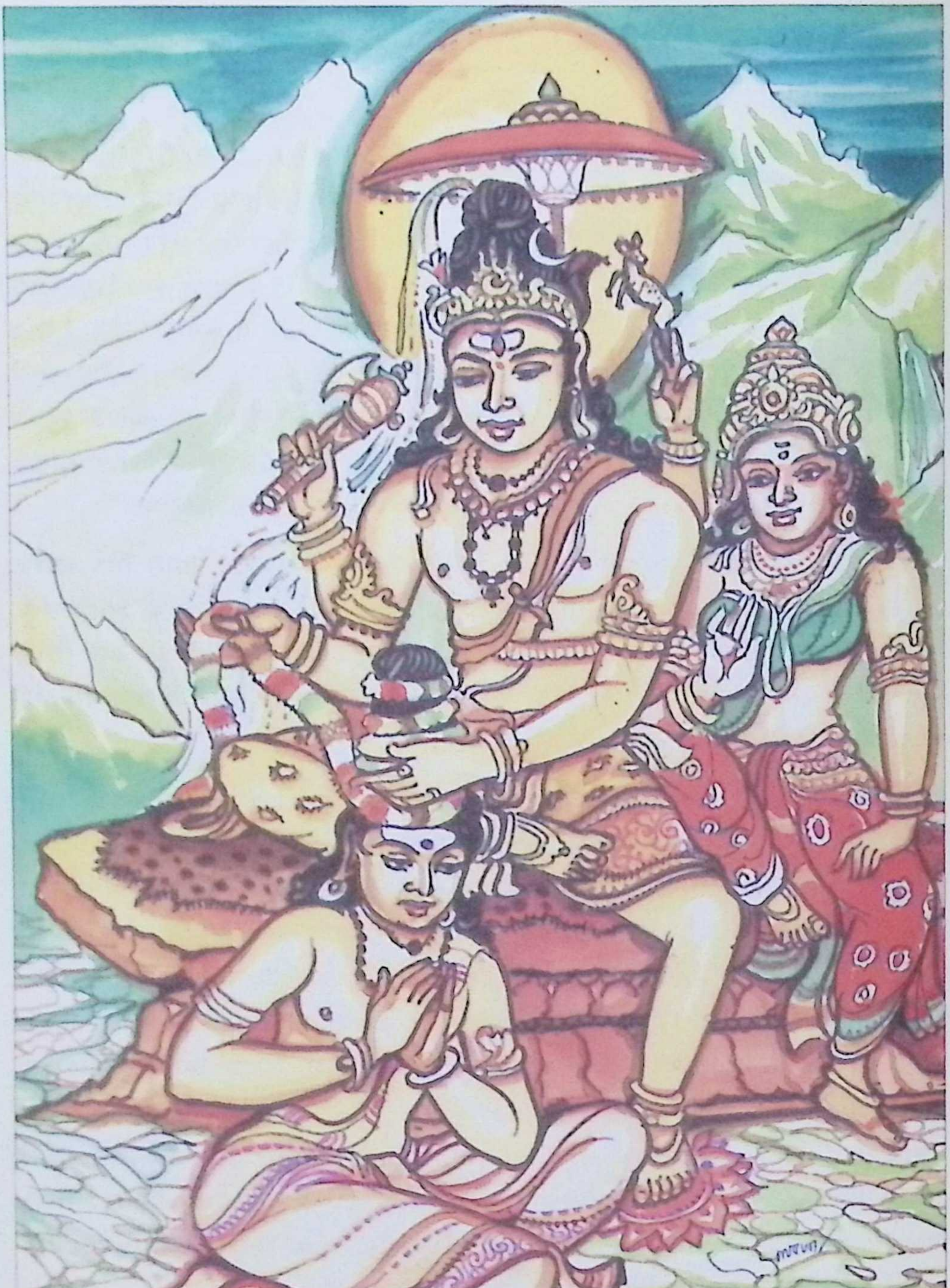
# CHANDESA NAYANAR



In the Chola kingdom there was a fertile town called Seigalur along the banks of river Manni. There were many scholars in the town and all the people were pious in general. Like the presence of salt even in the sea breeze along the shores, Siva was there in their very spirit. Knowledge in Vedas and Agamas was passed on through generations.

Vicharasarma was born to Yaksha Dattan. He and his wife were a very devoted couple, much given to charity and service. Vicharasarma was initiated into the learning of Vedas in his fifth year. He was compassionate to human beings as also animals, in whom he saw the Divine.

One day he saw a cowherd savagely beating a pregnant cow with a heavy stick. Vicharasarma immediately snatched the stick from the boy and admonished him. He explained the nobility of the animal, its usefulness and how it consumes hay and fodder that we have no use for, but delivers milk and dung useful to us. He also promised to take charge of the animals from that day, leading them to fresh pastures, taking them to shady spots to chew the cud while he played on his flute. He took them to the pond to drink water and cleaned them there scrubbing and scratching. He took care of them so well that they loved him dearly, in fact dearer than their own offspring, that whenever he touched them they milked readily.



As he took care of the cows, he also took care of his spiritual routine every day. He took bath in the river, collected the peepul twigs for the holy pyre and chanted "Aum" as he returned home. His Siva consciousness could also sense some special vibrations under an ebony tree on the sandhills along the riverside; there he found a new peace and meditated regularly. He even made a Lingam there and ceremoniously bathed (Abhishekam) it with milk. Even the cows gave the milk willingly and participated in his prayers.

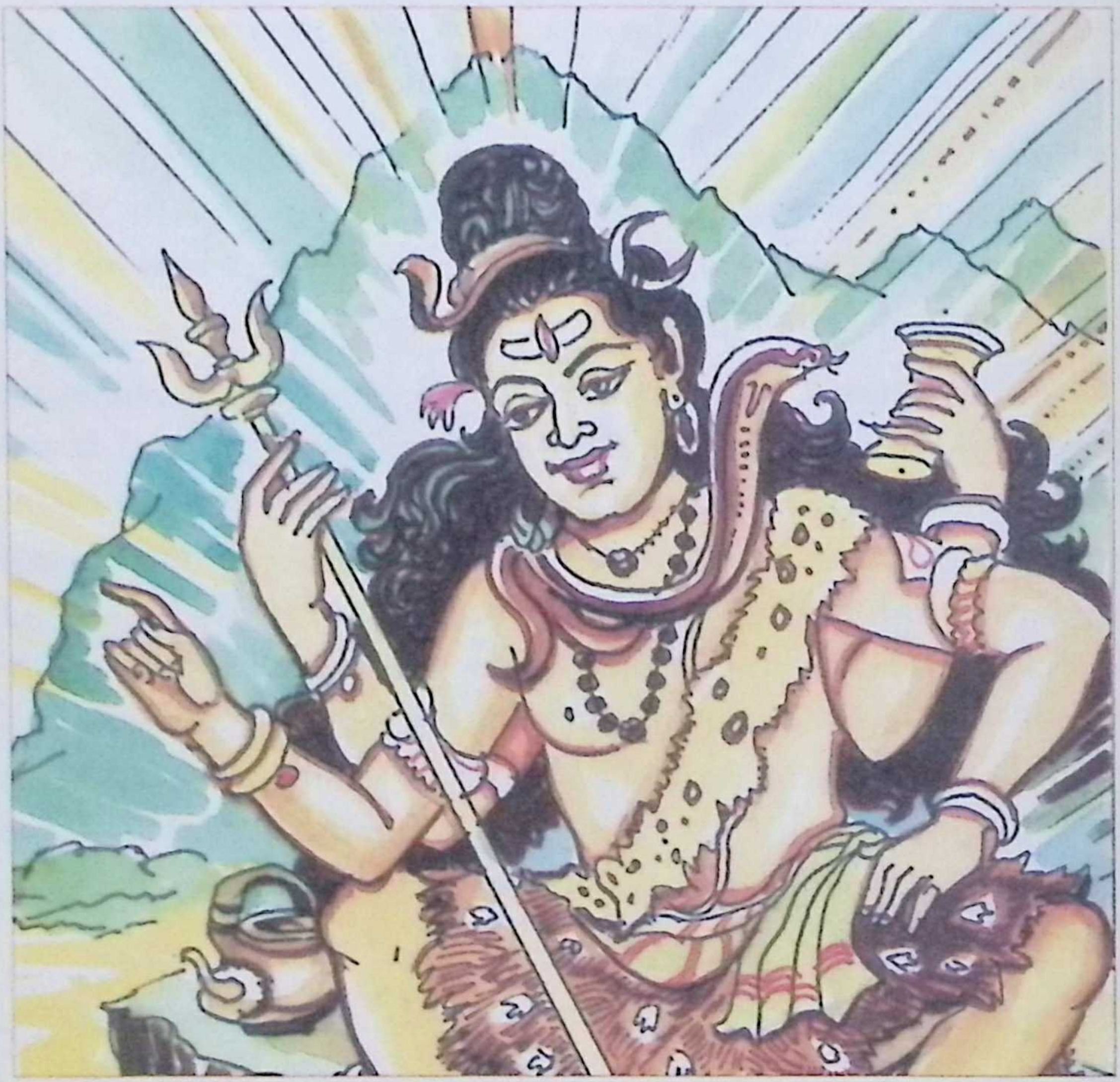
Some townsmen who witnessed this scene carried the story to the cowherd, who promptly conveyed the matter to Yaksha Datta, considering the whole act as a big monetary loss for him, an eccentric act bringing disgrace to the family.

Yaksha Dhatta took it upon him sincerely to salvage the prestige of the family by stopping his son from his silly act! It was midday and Yaksha hid himself behind a tree. Sarma made a sand Lingam and bathed it with milk and decorated with flowers and sat in mediatation. The father, blinded by rage, struck him with a stick and ordered him to stop that eccentric entravaganza. Yet Sarma continued his offerings oblivious of the disturbance. When Yaksha Datta kicked the pot of milk, Sarma simply considering that as an interference, severed the leg with a sword in a single stroke and continued his prayers without even realising whom he had hit.

It was then that the divine light of "Uma-Parameswara" engulfed him and he saw the Supreme Couple in the light. A mystic voice declared that Vicharasarma would henceforth be Their Chandes, since he had even injured his own father for the sake of Siva. Chandesa was proclaimed as the son of the Divine

couple, allowed all the freedom to wear what the Lord wore, eat what He ate and live the way the Divine couple did.

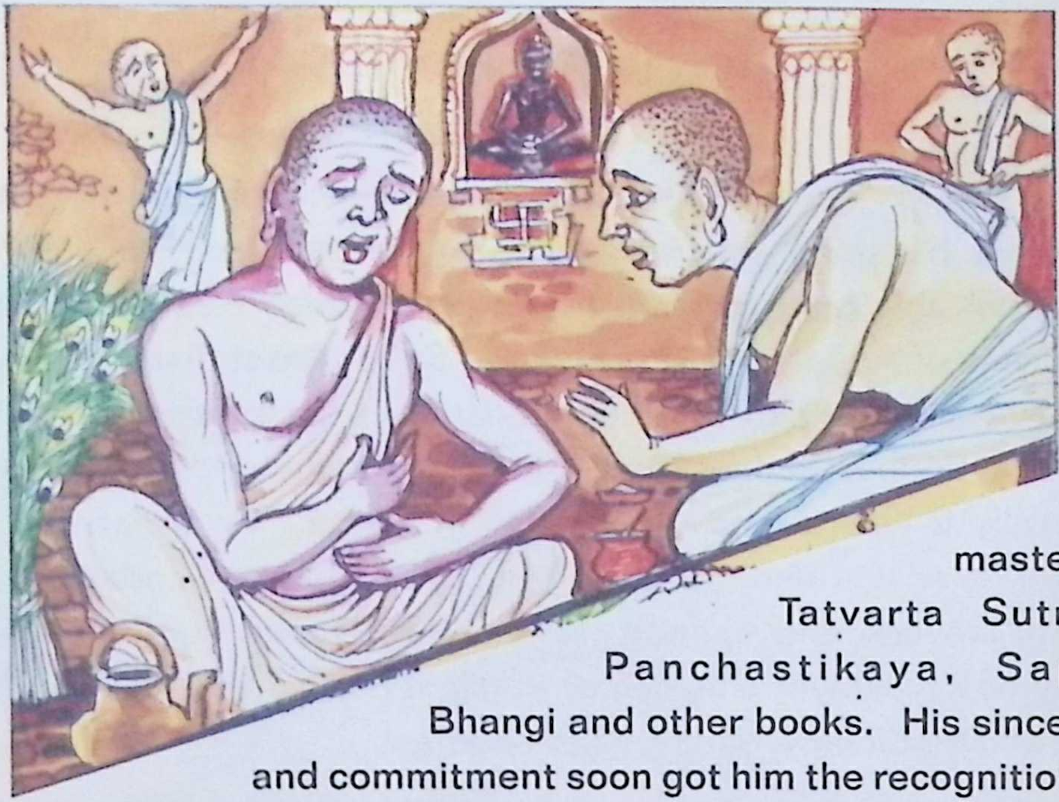
Siva garlanded Chandesa with flowers from His own tuft and the Heavens flowered their blessings upon him. It was then that Yaksha Datta realised his mistake and sought forgiveness. His legs were healed and every one was happy and at peace.



# APPAR THE DYNAMIC SAINT

Appar is one of the three accredited Saivite saints, the other two being Sundarar and Sambandar. As another acclaimed Tamil poet Sekkizhar put it, there is no single language that can say the greatness of Appar. What is now the South Arcot district was in those days known as Tiru Munai-Padi cherished by seven streams - Varaha, Ponnai, Pennar, Gadilam, Upper, Vellar and Manimukta. Naturally it was a land of plenty and peace. Its greatness is confirmed as it is also the native land of Sundarar; Sundarar was born at Navalur and Appar at Amur. Appar hails from the pious family of Korukaiyar's as son of Pugazhanar meaning figure of fame and Madiniar, meaning sweet damsel.

Appar as a child was named Marulnikki, meaning dispeller of ignorance and his sister Tilakavati was a paragon of feminine grace and chaste virtue. As Tilakavati came of age, she was bethrothed to marry a Wannier army chief Kalipagaiar, who died in a battle, honourably winning victory for his country. The news killed the parents of young Tilakavati, who also desired to end her life. But Marulnikki, a strong willed boy, restrained her from committing suicide and advised her, that all life was given, maintained and ended by only His will and took promise from her never to hasten to an untoward end. Marulnikki, was quite a learned and religious man. The sudden deaths in the family shocked him and he renounced home. He spent all his time and money in service of the poor and for social causes. He surrendered to non-violence as a school of thought and joined Jainism, which enjoyed the royal patronage under the Pallva king at Kanchipuram. He joined the Jaina college and

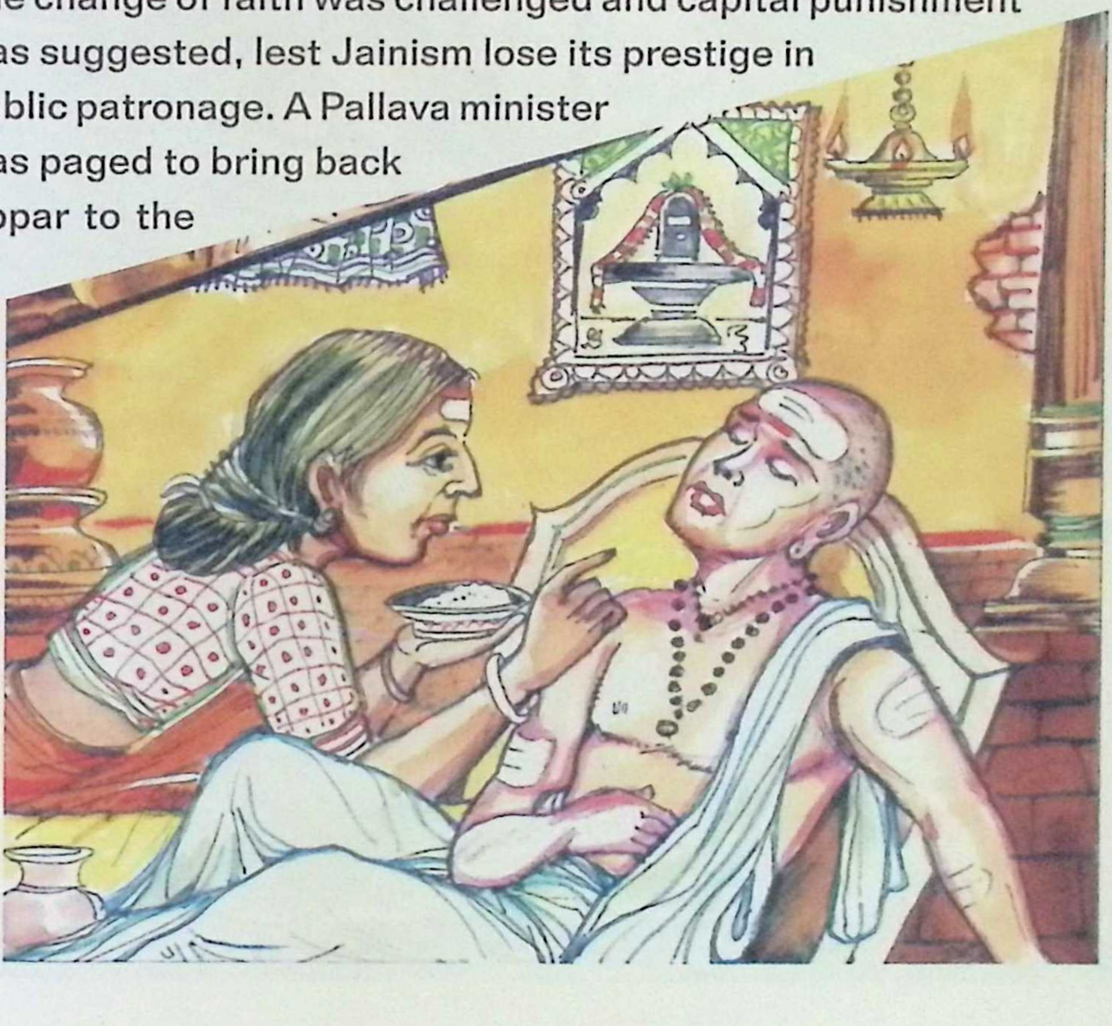


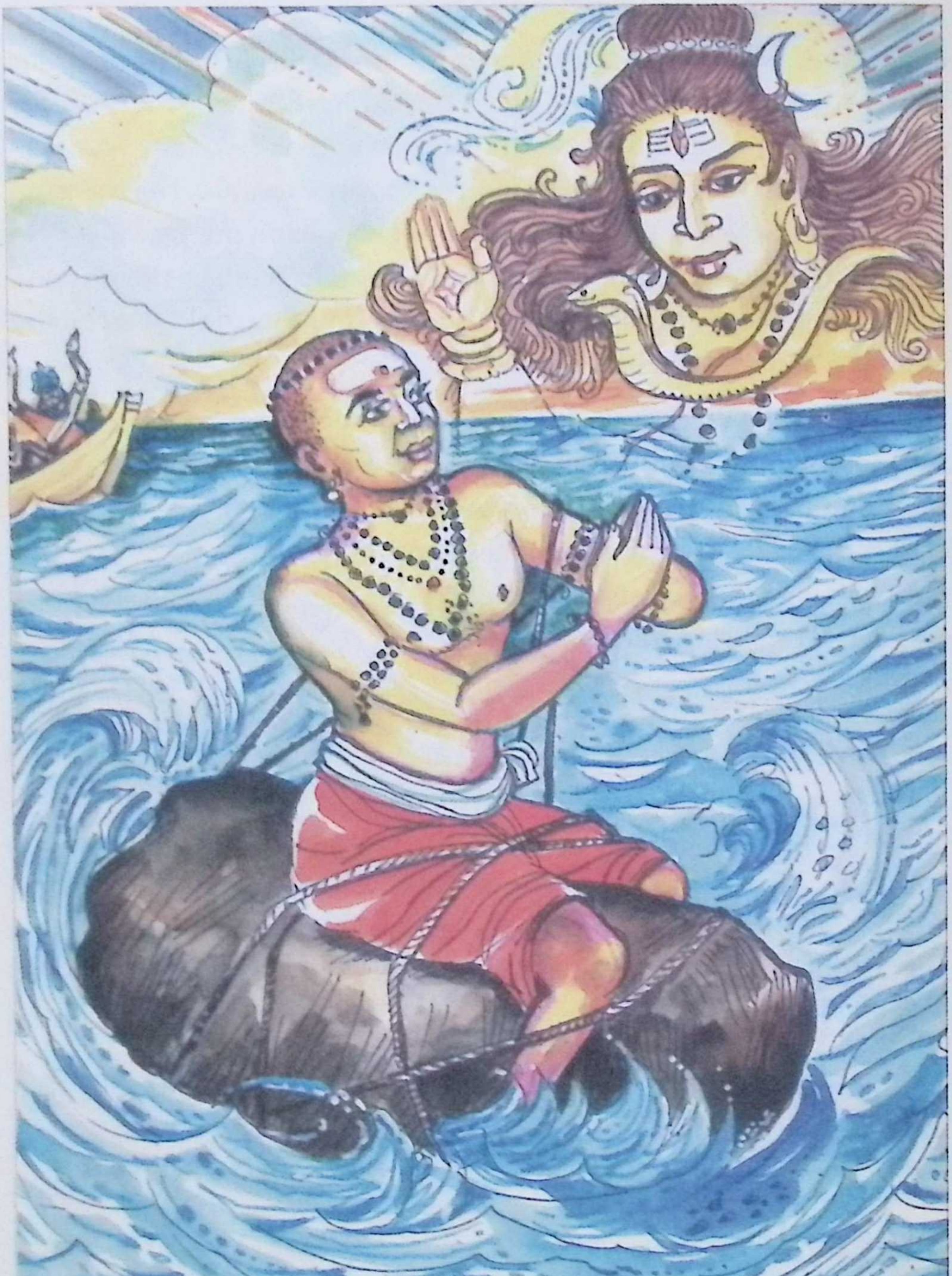
mastered Tatvarta Sutras, Panchastikaya, Sapta Bhangi and other books. His sincerity and commitment soon got him the recognition as Digambar Jain or Master.

In the meanwhile his sister Tilakavathy dedicated herself body and spirit to the service of the Lord at the temple at Tiru Adhikai Veerattanam. She prayed to Siva that her brother must return to the Truth of Hinduism and know the Ultimate Love. The kind God assured her in her dream that after a painful test he would be redeemed.In Pataliputra (Tirupathiripuliyur) Dharmasena as Marulnikki was called by the Jains, suffered from severe colic pain and there was no cure to be found. It was almost as if his last moments had come, he thought of his sister Tilakavati and her devotion to Siva. He sent word Through his cook to his sister and escaped with a reliable escort in the dead of the night. He left Jainism, the monastery, the cloth, all as a part of the dark night and with the new dawn reached his sister at the temple. She rubbed the holy ash and invited him into the God's

fold. He prostrated before the Lingam and began to sing Devarams. The pain was stopped instantly, the first of his Devaram was of repentance and seeking forgiveness. A voice appreciating his hymn came from space and named him Vagisa - Tiru Navukku Arasu, meaning king of the holy tongue. His learning and altruistic love revealed themself in excellent poetry. He preached people the great Love, the Ultimate truth to the people. His poetry was set to metre and sung to melody, enjoyed for the meaning and revered as a gospel.

Meanwhile at the Jain Monastery he was named a renegade and complained about to their king Mahendra Varman at Kanchi. The change of faith was challenged and capital punishment was suggested, lest Jainism lose its prestige in public patronage. A Pallava minister was paged to bring back Appar to the





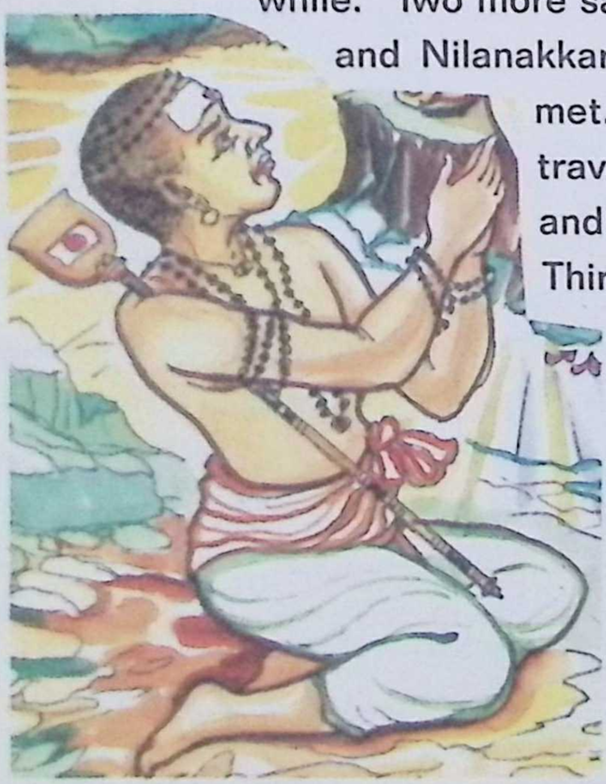
court of Mahendra Varman. The saint sang in his dauntless spirit that he was a subject to none, that he did not fear death and that he was answerable to no one except the great Lord Himself. But because the minister requested him repeatedly and personally as a favour, Appar went to Kanchipuram.

On being questioned about the change of faith, Appar answered that he wanted to belong to truth; to be on the side of god. The king's ego was hurt and threatened to do away with his hands that pray, his tongue that answered the king back. Appar explained the nature of the spirit that could not be burnt, bled, poisoned or sunk. It is a spirit that never dies and that it belonged to God alone. This challeged the limitations of Mahendra Varman's faith; forgetting his own faith of nonviolence, he ordered that Appar be thrown into the burning kiln. After a week the king sent his assassins to bring the ashes of the saint But the saint sat there fresh like a flower, chanting the holy five letters Na-ma-si-va-ya . The king on interrogation learnt that it was the power given to Appar by Nilakanta. Siva had swallowed the poison to save the Devas, while they were churning the ocean with the help of the snake Vasuki. Challenging if Nilakanta was going to save Appar the king asked the poison to be administered to him. The poison nevertheless did not have any effect. Next the royal elephant was turned lose to kick his head away. Tiru Navakku Arasu sang a song invoking Lord Ganesa and asked for his blessings. The royal tusker went round him, bowed to him and charged at those people, who had employed it.

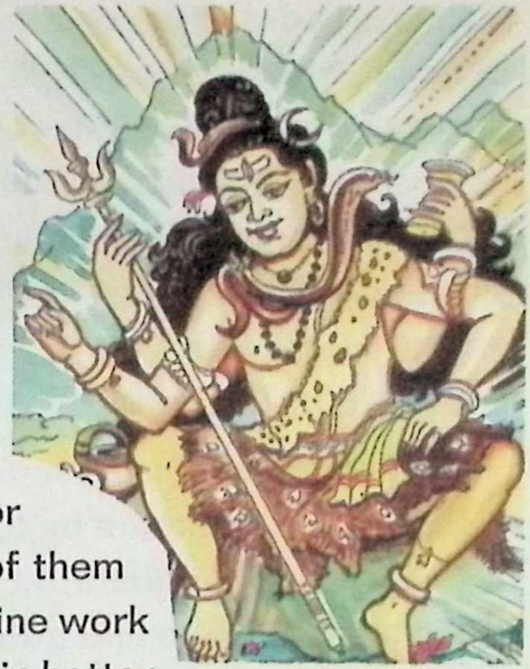
The tyranny of the king took a new turn. Appar was tied to a large stone and thrown into the sea. Strangely enough the stone floated like a wooden boat and brought Appar ashore. Even as

the water on the lotus leaf, if there be the faith in the Father over our daily trifle, we can tide over sorrows and misery. The place where Appar surfaced on shore is still known as Karai Yeri Vitta Kuppam, aptly named in Tamil.

Finally the king repented for all the cruelties done to the saint and became a Saivite himself. He pulled down the Jain monastry and built a new temple for Siva near Virattanam, the temple known as Gunadhara Isvaram. Appar toured far and wide to spread the great faith and love of God. At Sirkazhi he met Saint Sambandar, who embraced him calling him Appar (father). At Tingalur he met Appudi Adigal and performed the miracle of awakening his dead son; from there he went to Tiru Pazhavanam and Tiru-Arur. His hands cleaned the temple premises and his tongue sang the praise of the Lord and His infinite kindness. In the monastery of Muruganar Appar and Gnana Sambandar lived together for a while. Two more saints joined them. Siruthondar and Nilanakkar. What a joy when like minds met. Then Appar and Sambandar travelled further to Ambarmanagar and then to Thirukadavur. At Thirukadavur they stayed in the monastry of Kungilia Kalaya Nayanar.



From there they proceeded to Tiruvizhi Mizhali, six miles from Kutralur. That year rains had failed, rivers dried and crops failed. There was severe famine every where. Even the



saints were worried. God appeared in their dream and informed that, to help overcome their problem, He would leave a gold coin for each one of them on the pedestal. Everyday a gold coin began to appear- one on the eastern pedestal and one on the western pedestal. The coin meant for Appar was changed without any problem. Whereas the coin meant for Sambandar was discounted. Both of them fed devotees and carried on their divine work freely, their faith and service brought in better times and famine ceased. The two saints then went to Vedavanam. The main gate of the temple there remained closed since the olden days when Devas worshiped Siva there. Sambandar requested Appar to sing the doors open, so the devotees might find it convenient to worship the Lord. When Appar sang the ten verses the doors flew open and the gathering hailed the God's name. And Sambandar wished the doors to close, for ready and easy operation of the doors, and just in one song the doors closed; the numbers puzzled Appar. Then again in the dream he was directed to go to Voimur. A divine light led him on from a distance and disappeared into the temple.

Appar stood there stupefied when Sambandar too joined him. Appar prayed to the Lord to show Himself to Sambandar, who could close the Vedic doors with one verse, when he had to sing ten to open it. And the Lord appeared as the Divine Light again to please him. It was said that the Lord lost himself in the joy of listening to the excellent hymns of Appar and wishing to hear more

of the same did not open the door at Vedavanam. The place is also called Vedaranyam or Thiru Maraikadu. It was then that the king and queen of Pandya kingdom paid their respect to the Saints and requested Sambandar to visit Madurai and re- establish the faith of Saivism. Appar offered to go there himself, worried by the earlier tortures and sufferings in the hands of Jains. But the boy saint wished to brave it himself in the name of god. Appar too parted ways wishing him well. He visited Nagai, Mizhalai and Avadu-Turai.

At Pazhaiyarai, in a temple called vadatali the main image was missing. It was hidden by the jains. Appar went on a fast to have the reigning Lord reinstated. The king in his dream had a revelation of the hidden image and ordered to install the same in the temple. The king discovered it and kept it in the sanctum sanctorum with a great ceremonial celebration. Appar broke his fast after praying at the feet of the idol. After Pazhaiyarai, Appar visited Anaika Tiruchirapalli, Thiruparaithurai and was going to Paingili. He was very tired and hungry, yet he continued with the will to see the God at the temple. Enroute he was encountered by a Divine looking, kind man who led him to a shady grove, offered food and comforted him with warm words. Then the mystic companion accompanied him to Paingili and as the temple came into sight, he vanished. Appar realising who the companion was, thanked the great God for being his guide and guardian.

Appar was getting old and wanted to have the vision of the Lord at Mount Kailash. On the way he passed through Kanchipuram, the place where once he was tortured. But this time people received him with great respect and love, offered food and shelter. From Kanchi Appar walked to Tiru-Kazhu Kundram. Then he went to Tiruvanmiyur, Mylapore, Tiruvottriyur, and Kalahasti. He visited all the temples enroute, irrespective of the size and



significance, to Mount Kailash. He visited Benaras, bathed in the Ganges and began his climb of the mountain. Even for young people, climbing mountains braving the nights and wild animals, the rocks and rains was not an easy task. Appar, unmindful of his age and failing health, hurting bones and bleeding limbs, climbed and crawled with the only aim to see Kailash. A sage interrupted him and inquired, what he was up to in the mountains, at his age and dissuaded him from proceeding further. Yet Appar continued with his passion and progressed steadily. The sage suddenly vanished and a voice was heard in the void that he had to sing more, to serve more to His absolute pleasure and directed him to plunge into a spring there to rise up at Tiru Aiyaru and there at Tiru Aiyaru he would behold the vision of Siva and Sakthi as at Kailash. Appar immediately obeyed the celestial voice. He took a dip in the pond and rose up in the temple tank at Tiru Aiyaru, was well healed of the hurting and bleeding wounds. The temple of Tiru Aiyaru became Kailash. Indra and his train of Devas were

chanting hymns and vedas. Nandi Deva was there as attendant. Kailash in its full glory was seen with silver creeks and the Cosmic Couple blessed him. He gave out a few verses singing the absolute joy of such a vision.

At Tirpunturuthi near Tiru-Aiyaru he raised a mutt, where he composed a lot more hymns, the essence of the Vedas and Agamas. It was then the victorious Sambandar returned from Madurai, after re-establishing the faith of Saivism. Appar humbly joined the crowd that welcomed Sambandar unknown to others, he bore the palanquin of the boy prodigy over his shoulders. Sambandar asked for the whereabouts of Appar near Thirupunturuthi and Appar answered him humbly as ever. Sambandar immediately got down from the palanquin, paid his obeisance, embraced and exchanged information about the victory of Saivism at Madurai. Appar took leave of Sambandar, went to Madurai, sporting the royal patronage for Saivism and visited all temples enroute to Rameswaram. Then he returned to Pugalur and spent his days singing God's glory.

Again one day the lord wanted to try him, playing illusions. As he was cutting the grass in the temple courtyard, heaps of gold and precious gems were placed among the grass before him. He just cleared them as rubbish and continued with his work. Fair damsels danced around and doted upon him with deliberate intentions. Appar just ignored them and sang out to Siva that all his being belonged only to Siva and he would hear nothing other than his praise, see nothing except His form, think nothing but the great joy of unifying with Him. His form melted into the Divine. But his psalms reverberate still. He was a true apostle of God, who upheld Saivism, and his songs kindle the spiritual fire.

# KULACHIRAI NAYANAR



Tirugnana Sambandar, the poet laureate, applauds Kulachirai Nayanar in his hymns as a rare gem of a soul given to Saivism. Kulachirai hailed from Manamelkudi, a fertile village in the Pandya kingdom. He lived in the same period as Thirugnana Sambandar. Kulachirai was a wise and shrewd noble man. He treated all the Siva devotees with equal respect; little did he care to know their caste or creed or status. Kulachirai served the devotees in total sincerity and dedication, that he was described by Saint Sundarar as Peru Nambi, one worthy of honour. His intelligence and devout sense of service won him the post of chief minister at the court of the Pandya king Nedumaran. King Nedumaran was a believer of Jainism. With the help of the queen,

who was also a devotee of Siva, Kulachirai invited Gnanasambandar to Madurai. He convened a Sadas (seminar) for fair discussion, weighing the foundations and facts in both the schools of thought, namely Saivism and Jainism. The king's faith was restored to Saivism, thanks to Gnanasambandar and Kulachirai. The Jains felt a sense of betrayal and unable to digest the defeat tried even self immolation. It was a revival of faith, a religious renaissance in the Pandya kingdom.



# STORIES OF 63 SAINTS OF SOUTH INDIA

The Periyapuranam, delineating the lives of the 63 famous Saivite saints of Tamil Nadu, known popularly as the "Arupathumoonru Nayanmar," was written by Sekkizhar, a wise chief minister of the Chola kingdom. Since then these stories have been narrated by countless generations of scholars in the temples of Tamil Nadu, and retold in both Tamil and English.

The devotion of these saints to Lord Siva was all encompassing. They were prepared to sacrifice not only their material wealth but even their lives and those of their families in the service of the Lord and His devotees. The numerous verses composed by the 63 saints in praise of Lord Siva in the various temples of Tamil Nadu have stood the test of time. The life histories of these saints serve as a role model to young people, and speak of the importance of devotion to duty and commitment to society.

The present stories have been retold in simple English for the benefit of young readers in India and abroad by Kalpana Ramani, Asha Kannan and Bhama Chandran, and edited by Lakshmi Venkatraman. Every story is brought to life in the evocative illustrations of Subha. This book is the first in a series of eight volumes envisaged by the Koviloor Adinam Children's Book Trust.

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